

**TOWN OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 29, 2016**

**2016-17 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET AS PROPOSED BY THE TOWN MANAGER AND
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS BUDGET HEARING:**

Vice President Cantor: Okay, I'm going call the 2 p.m. 2016-17 Fiscal Year Budget as proposed by the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools Budget Hearing. Roll call, Ms. Labrot?

Councilors Barnes, Cantor, Casperson, Davidoff, Hall, Kerrigan, and Wenograd were present. Councilors Slifka and Williams were absent.

Vice President Cantor: Okay. Sign-up sheet? First speaker, Bruce Grower. Come up to the mike, and then there's a button that will say "talk" on it. Press that. Thank you. You need it for the record. Thank you.

Mr. Grower: Hello. My name is Bruce Grower. We ended up buying a house, 50 Brightview Drive, in October 2014. Before that, we lived in West Hartford renting for about ten years. We remember going to different meetings to find out about this budget committee, and they were saying at the time that when they end up building Blue Back Square, taxes will go down. Unfortunately, taxes never did go down. Why does West Hartford spend money to build islands in the street because you end up having' to pay more money just for extra upkeep when if you never built it in the first place, that would be even more money that would be in West Hartford? Also, around the neighborhood that I live, I noticed that they repaved a number of streets that did not need to be repaved. Why can't West Hartford tax businesspeople and the people that own property less? With all these different businesses, I feel that they should be paying a much higher share of the costs. Also, at these meetings, can you guys change the format so that when we ask questions, you guys can answer instead of remaining silent and just listening? That would be much more helpful and much more democratic. It would really be appreciated. Thank you.

Vice President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Grower. Next speaker is Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy: Unaccustomed as I am, is this working now? Oh, okay. The question asked before, we sent folks a letter. We also sent it to department heads, and so that everybody's talking' outta the same book. In any event, my remarks today, believe it or not'll be different than the last time. Good evening. My name is George Kennedy. I live at 19 Waterside Lane. I've been a resident since 1950 and attended West Hartford schools. I also come—I'm sorry? Oh, maybe that was feedback in this. I also come from a family of teachers. My mother taught in Hartford for 43 years, and I only taught two years. Once again, and don't let this go to your head. Once again, I have to commend your efforts. Your decision to preclude multistory development at the Center in order to preserve its character was great. Thank you very much. The developers will build anything they can get a space to put the—their hammer on. That's two kudos in a row, and some of my members are getting kind of angry 'because I compliment you. But you have an opportunity to earn a third kudo if you just listen to this and try to do it. Last hearing, I implored you to reduce the Board of Education budget. It continues to grow and is becoming unsustainable over the long haul. Student population is projected to decline by 600 and yet the budget is not

reduced. Why? For the fifth consecutive year, Glastonbury, and I'm sure you've seen this, with no declines to student population is reducing its budget by \$781,000 as advised by its Board of Finance, which many towns in the valley out here also have. West Hartford needs a Board of Finance to provide an arm's length, third party, transparent review of budget procedures and preparation. And it also removes the burden—the review burden—from you people. We have financial talent in town and nobody should be threatened by such a board. We, the West Hartford Taxpayers Association, have been advocating establishment of a Finance Board for at least eight years. It is in everybody's interest. Think of it this way, when you take a look at the Board of Education budget, it's this thick. It's all full of equivalencies and salaries and things like this. I had a CPA look at it, and they had trouble with it. Now the reality is we got one CPA, I believe, and the rest are lawyers and teachers. You don't know what's in that budget, and my feeling is—oh, you've got an MBA, too, I remember. But the reality is, the budget is too difficult and too big for most people to really get their hands around it. A Board of—A Financial Board would do a couple things. You can get the talent. They don't have to be threatening'. Half Republicans, half Democrats, whatever. But the point is they would take the burden off you from being the good guys or the bad guys. One of your members said to me, "Tell me what to reduce." Well, that's true. That's not my job, but the reality is I don't think anybody knows what to reduce. And so what happens is, in my opinion, it gets rubber stamped. This can be avoided with a Financial Advisory Board. Apparently, West Hartford has had positive results in the past year or so, but that is no reason to continue spending. Just because the money's there. Now is the time to save dollars, not the opportunity to spend more in different areas and reduce the budget further. We all ought to take a book outta—a page outta nature. Watch a squirrel. What does he do? He gathers nuts. He digs holes. Maybe he doesn't find 'em again, but he puts 'em away for the future. You have an opportunity to save money, put it in a Rainy Day Fund to reduce the taxes further. I mean, the squirrels got half of our brain power. Well, in some cases actually they have as much, but, literally, the squirrels, I mean [chuckles], pea-sized brain. They do better than we do in many cases. Let's emulate nature. And some economic gurus are talking—of course you've always got the naysayers—that a major financial market adjustment is due. If that's the case, let's be like a squirrel and provide for it. Thank you.

Vice President Cantor: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. That's all that was on the sign-up sheet. If there's anybody else that would like to speak to this hearing, come up to the podium and please state your name and address.

Ms. Lawlor: My name is Dolores Lawlor, and I live here in West Hartford.

Vice President Cantor: Please state your address.

Ms. Lawlor: Excuse me?

Vice President Cantor: For the record. You need to state your address for the record, please.

Ms. Lawlor: Oh, 2308 Albany Avenue, 06117.

Vice President Cantor: Thank you.

Ms. Lawlor: I was just thinking, my late husband, when I used to go to meetings like this, used to say to me, "They're futile." And I would say, "Whaddaya mean? For instance, if something isn't working, they're going to eliminate." And he said, "No, they're never gonna eliminate." He said, "Because the aim is to keep paying more money in taxes because they're never going to

admit that they made a mistake.” And I’m afraid that’s what might be happening here. I’ve been living in West Hartford for a little over 30 years, and I feel I paid for my house at least two times, through taxes, not to mention my 1998 automobile, which I am being urged by family members to buy another one because this one is so old, and I tell them no, because as soon as I buy a new car, the taxes go up, and I start paying for another car twice. I, I don’t know. Maybe my husband was right. Maybe it is futile to be here. But I’m hoping that you’re gonna hear some voices today and reconsider this budget increase, and I think it’s strange that at a time when the governor of our state is demanding big cuts in the state is that we’re turning around at this time when things are so bad out there for a lot of people, and we’re doing the opposite. I don’t know if my husband was right, as I said, but I hope you’re listening. Thank you.

Vice President Cantor: Thank you. Is there anybody else that would like to speak for the Public Hearing? Mr. Kennedy, I just wanted to clarify a point. We have not voted on the, on the BC Zone change. We have continued that hearing because we had not heard from TPZ back yet. So that is being continued, and then...

Mr. Kennedy: So no second Kudos.

Vice President Cantor: Right. Take back your kudos now. We will after. If you would like to speak, come on up. State your name and your address.

Ms. Lachalier: Hello. My name is Ana Lachelier. I live at 128 Haynes Road, and I’ll be very brief. Everyone has said what I’ve, I’ve, I’m gonna say, probably, but I wanna stress the fact that the constant raising of the taxes is sending people out of town. Every time you raise the taxes and people get notices, the For Sale signs go all over the town. Not only that, but I can’t understand how anyone will be able to afford to buy a house. So if we go to sell our houses now, I don’t know who’s gonna wanna pay almost \$6000 for my house on, on Haynes Road. So we’re pricing ourselves out—you’re sending people out of town, and I agree that the Board of Education Budget is too bloated now. As well as the fact as Bruce brought out, that Blue Back Square hasn’t been paying higher taxes since it was built as far as I know, so if you could please consider the, the people who live in this town, and if you’re not gonna be bringing, transferring the, the taxes to the, the ones who should be paying it, likely the businesses, we’re all gonna have to leave. And then what are you gonna do? Thank you.

Vice President Cantor: Thank you very much. Anybody else? Okay. Public Hearing is closed. Thank you.

Hearing closed at 2:15 p.m.

Essie S. Labrot
Town/Council Clerk

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